

INTERNATIONAL FIREFIGHTERS' DAY

Statement

HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural) [5.33 pm]: I rise to make a member's statement on a topic that is dear to my heart. On Sunday, 7 May, the International Firefighters' Day memorial service was held in Kings Park at the Firefighters' Memorial Grove. The Minister for Emergency Services attended and laid a wreath, as did my colleague Hon Martin Aldridge. I was not able to attend, but I wanted to mention the event to remind members that the names of the 86 firefighters who have died while serving in Western Australia are now enshrined on plaques at the Firefighters' Memorial Grove. It is a wonderful tribute to the sacrifice and service of those people. International Firefighters' Day is held annually on 4 May, which coincides with the feast day of St Florian, the patron saint of firefighters, a fact that I was unaware of until I read the minister's excellent media release. I hope to attend next year's memorial day at Kings Park.

I want to mention one particular individual whose name is on a plaque at the memorial—Ernest White. Ernie White was born in 1912 in a tent on a farm in Wickepin that my relations owned for a short time at some stage and was a next-door neighbour of my family. Ernie very sadly passed away in 1967. He was killed in a vehicle accident while volunteering as a local firefighter at an organised roadside burn. I thought I might tell members the circumstances of the family's very tragic past. In 1952, Ernie and Ruth White's very young son Heath was killed in a dam on the family farm just across the road from our place. A few years later, Ruth, Ernie's wife and Heath's mum, was diagnosed with cancer and she passed away in 1967. Later the same year, Ernie volunteered to do the right thing and turned up at the local fire brigade and was hit and killed in a very tragic vehicle accident. My uncle was standing next to Ernie when he was hit and suffered very serious injuries but survived, thank goodness. He was also involved in that accident.

Importantly, a couple of months ago, my local community decided that it was appropriate to have a memorial to Ernie at the local community centre. They held a function, and Ernie's relations came back to Wickepin to celebrate his life and service, so I thought I would pass on those comments and congratulate the minister and others for attending the memorial service on our behalf.